OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)
23 July 2016

REGIONS REVIEW PROJECT

The CEC is asked to :-

i) receive an update on this project.

Background

1. A review by SUMS Consultancy of the Students Association’s structure and activity in the English regions took place in late 2015. This was in line with the organisation’s strategic objective that set out a commitment to reshape the structure of the Students Association in the regions and nations. The review included stakeholder interviews, a survey of student members of English assemblies, a student consultation, a CEC workshop and a focus group event drawing on the experience of past and present active members of the Association. This project was supported by a working group comprising of a number of key Officers and a team of Office staff.

2. In its conclusion, the review identified a number of key purposes for OU Student Association involvement in regions and nations, these being, democracy including student representation, student community, volunteering opportunities and student awareness. The review outlined four alternate models describing ways that the Students Association might organise to fulfil these key purposes. The option recommended by the consultant, favoured by the working Group and later endorsed by the Executive Committee, described a mixed model that emphasised both the representative purpose and the social purpose of the Students Association and showed a recognition that many students only wish to be involved with one of these. This model suggested cutting ties to a regional structure and focusing from a representative perspective on students’ faculties, mirroring changes happening across the Open University.
3. The review endorsed the new role of Faculty Association Representatives and suggested a new layer of student volunteers who would act as their eyes and ears around learning issues, feeding information and student opinions up through the Association.

4. The review suggested an English National Executive existing on a similar basis to the current equivalents in the Celtic Nations. It recommended the establishment of a network of local student groups relying on centralised support to promote, publicise and resource them. It also suggested a register of student volunteers managed and supported centrally and resource to identify new opportunities for volunteering and utilising the efforts of the many interested students offering different levels of time and commitment.

5. The Working Group has continued to meet to plan for next steps but has been aware that key decisions should be left for relevant incoming Officers who would be taking work streams forward.

6. Prior to implementation, Celtic nations elected to be part of the restructure from the outset.

Towards Implementation – progress to date.

7. The Working Group produced a discussion paper around how the new layer of Reps, (Learning Experience Reporters) might operate that included the suggestion of a pilot exercise to be launched in the autumn. The decision was taken to discuss this detail at a future meeting, soon after 1st August, when the new Vice President Representation and Research could be involved.

8. A Community Groups project was launched at Conference 2016. It included a pledge activity that resulted in 99 attenders leaving their details about being further contacted as part of the project and having their details shared with others in the same locality in order to initiate some early Groups. Further work is ongoing to establish support packs, advice and guidance and publicity for the Groups. Details of the work to date on the Community Groups project will be passed from Vice President Representation to the Vice President Community elect at a meeting on 25th July, to inform her of progress to date and decide on next steps with particular reference to the forthcoming Freshers in September/October.

9. A pilot volunteer project was created encouraging active students to stage local events or to provide a Student Association presence at OU day schools, revision weekends, Business School Residential weekends as well as student society events. Results of this project are now being collected to assess the value of this activity for the Students Association.
10. With the backing of the Board of Trustees, a business case was produced for the Open University Vice Chancellor’s Executive, being a bid for sufficient funds to properly implement and support the Review’s recommendations. This request centred on funding to employ a new team of staff to undertake the resulting projects.

11. On the basis of the ability to employ a new team of staff, discussions are in place to ask the University to consider new premises on the OU Campus for the Students Association to include a social and meeting place for visiting students.

Recent Updates

12. The bid for funding has been successful and was endorsed by the University Council on 12th March.

13. Work is now underway to scope out the new job roles and initiate an employment exercise.

14. A meeting to talk to the University Estates about new premises will take place on 25th July.

Wendy Burrell
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